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Letter dated 13 April 2012 from the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

In accordance with the decision of the Government of Ireland in 2006 to present its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the term 2013-2015 at the election to be held in 2012, and pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251, I have the honour to submit the attached document setting out the voluntary pledges and commitments made by the Government of Ireland with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights (see annex).

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated to the Member States as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Anne **Anderson**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/67/50.

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Annex to the letter dated 13 April 2012 from the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Ireland to the Human Rights Council, 2013-2015

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

1. Ireland pressed hard for the establishment of the Human Rights Council, arguing for a body that would not only serve as a strong advocate and guardian of universal human rights but would be representative of the United Nations membership.

2. Ireland is strongly committed to the full promotion of human rights in both its domestic and foreign policies. Our historical experience informs our approach to human rights, and our Constitution, through its recognition of fundamental rights, guarantees the individual citizen freedom, equality and justice.

3. In 2006, Ireland declared its intention to seek membership of the Human Rights Council at elections which will take place in 2012. This will be the first time that Ireland has sought election to the Council. If elected, Ireland will be a member of the Council from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2015.

4. As a small State, Ireland is profoundly attached to multilateralism. Our commitment to the United Nations is a cornerstone of Irish foreign policy. Ireland strongly believes that States must work together in cooperation and genuine dialogue in order to strengthen commitment and capacity to comply with human rights obligations. We recognize that development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and our policies at the United Nations have consistently sought to recognize that reality:

(a) Despite current economic difficulties, Ireland has continued to allocate more than 0.5 per cent of its gross national product (GNP) to official development assistance (ODA). In 2010, Ireland allocated 0.53 per cent of its GNP to ODA. The Programme for Government 2011 committed to a target allocation of 0.7 per cent of GNP for ODA;

(b) The Irish Defence Forces have contributed to international peacekeeping for more than 50 years. We are a strong supporter of the work of the Peacebuilding Commission;

(c) Ireland is proud of its record in the promotion of human rights at the United Nations, and was honoured by the appointment of the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002.

5. As this is the first time Ireland is seeking election, we hope to be afforded the opportunity to contribute to a strong and dynamic Human Rights Council that can play a real and meaningful role in the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. With this goal in mind, Ireland commits to the voluntary pledges and commitments listed below.

To work for a strong and effective Human Rights Council, and reinforce human rights at the heart of the United Nations

6. Ireland is committed to a robust and effective Human Rights Council at the heart of international endeavours. We want to see a principled Council that provides real leadership to the international community. If elected, we will seek clear and strong action by the Council in addressing human rights violations and in promoting human rights. We also seek a Council that works in a positive and constructive environment where countries can share experiences and learn from one another. We will facilitate open and transparent dialogue among States, building on shared goals and priorities in order to achieve meaningful progress.

7. Recognizing that the universal periodic review process has opened up an important space for national dialogue on human rights and can make a real difference on the ground, Ireland will continue to participate actively in universal periodic review working groups to ensure that each review is focused on the improvement of the situation of human rights in the country under review and that the second cycle of the universal periodic review allows that mechanism to fulfil its potential. Ireland will continue to engage positively and constructively with all stakeholders in the universal periodic review process. Ireland was reviewed under the mechanism on 6 October 2011. The report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review was formally adopted by the Human Rights Council on 15 March 2012. Of the 127 recommendations made by Member States, Ireland was able to fully accept 91 recommendations and to accept in part a further 17; it was unable to support only 19. It is particularly important to Ireland that, in the years leading up to our next universal periodic review, the momentum set in train for the first cycle is not lost. Ireland is committed to submitting a voluntary interim report on its progress in implementing our commitments.

8. In parallel with membership on the Human Rights Council, Ireland will continue its strong engagement in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, as it is the only United Nations body with universal membership responsible for addressing human rights issues.

9. Ireland will support the work of an independent and properly resourced Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), including through the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the work of the United Nations. In 2011, Ireland continued to provide funding to OHCHR, maintaining our support at the same level as 2009 and 2010.

10. Ireland will continue its support for the valuable role of non-governmental organizations and civil society in the promotion and protection of human rights at both the State and international levels. We will advocate for the provision of greater training and guidance for civil society groups who seek to participate in the mechanisms of the Human Rights Council. We place special emphasis on supporting the participation of marginalized groups in the United Nations human rights system, in particular through their input into the universal periodic review process. This support includes funding to non-governmental organizations for the training of human rights organizations in developing countries to enable them to work effectively with United Nations human rights mechanisms.

To take forward work on a number of themes for the advancement of global human rights

Investing in development is investing in human rights

11. Ireland recognizes that the enjoyment of all human rights — civil, cultural, economic, political and social — is essential for development. Equally, development is essential to enable the full enjoyment of those rights.

12. Ireland has a proud and strong record of providing assistance to developing countries to address poverty, vulnerability and marginalization. Ireland focuses on developing the institutions and capacity within developing countries to empower them to do this themselves, guided by the Millennium Development Goals. The Government of Ireland is committed to the target of providing 0.7 per cent of its GNP for official development assistance.

13. The Government of Ireland is committed to ensuring that human rights are at the heart of its development cooperation programme, Irish Aid, which is an integral part of Irish foreign policy. Ireland is committed to supporting State institutions and independent organizations that promote human rights, governance and democracy. Ireland is committed to supporting national human rights institutions and to strengthening governance by supporting initiatives to build democratic systems of government and effective, accountable institutions for service delivery. Ireland provides funding to a wide range of non-governmental organizations working on human rights issues and supports national human rights commissions in a number of developing countries.

14. Ireland will cooperate with other United Nations Member States, especially developing countries, least developed countries and small island States, upon request, in their implementation of human rights obligations through capacity-building by way of technical cooperation, human rights dialogue and exchange of experts. We will also engage in dialogue on associated public policy issues and provide grants to non-governmental organizations focusing on development and human rights to work on specific areas.

15. Ireland recognizes that climate change and its effects present a significant challenge to development. In the face of deteriorating environmental conditions, the realization of fundamental human rights is a growing challenge. Ireland will work with other States, in particular with small island developing States, to explore how the Human Rights Council can address the adverse impacts of climate change on fundamental human rights.

Combating discrimination and gender-based violence

16. Ireland pledges to play a full role in efforts to combat all forms of discrimination and to promote gender equality. Ireland has a strong track record in addressing gender equality through its foreign policy and development cooperation programme, and was at the forefront in advocating the establishment of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Together with a number of Irish development and human rights non-governmental organizations, the Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Defence Forces, established the Irish Joint Consortium on Gender-Based Violence in 2004 to promote the adoption of a coherent and coordinated approach to this important issue. In June 2007 the Government established Cosc, the

National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. An Act of Parliament prohibiting the practice of female genital mutilation was passed on 28 March 2012.

17. Ireland is fully committed to the objectives of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and has adopted a national action plan on the resolution. The national action plan was informed by a cross-learning initiative which involved participants from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Liberia and Timor-Leste. The cross-learning process was designed to draw upon the experiences of those directly affected by conflict in relation to how best to protect women from gender-based violence during conflict and promote women's leadership and interest in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Furthermore, Ireland supports the Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign and has provided funding to the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women.

18. The Irish Defence Forces have a workplace policy on human rights and a dignity charter designed to create awareness of the Defence Forces' role and obligations in relation to gender-based violence and human rights. The Defence Forces ensure that personnel deploying on active service to missions throughout the world receive detailed instruction on human rights, including those of minorities and women, cultural awareness issues and codes of conduct and behaviour both for the conduct of their missions and also for their individual behaviour. The instruction is tailored to fit a mission-specific profile and to further contribute to the obligations of Ireland pursuant to the women, peace and security agenda of the United Nations.

Hunger

19. Ireland has made the fight against global hunger a priority of its development programme. On the basis of the recommendations of the Government's Hunger Task Force, Ireland is prioritizing its action in three areas: improving the agricultural productivity of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa, with a particular focus on women farmers; targeting maternal and infant undernutrition; and promoting governance and leadership in the fight against global hunger nationally and internationally. Irish Aid is now directing 20 per cent of its budget to hunger-related activities. This represents a significant increase in its efforts to tackle global hunger and clearly indicates that the Government's commitment to ensuring the fight against global hunger is a core priority of the Irish Aid programme. Ireland is now playing a leading role in galvanizing international action to combat undernutrition in mothers, infants and children, including by targeting the vital 1,000 days from pregnancy to a child's second birthday. Ireland is one of the principal supporters of the Scaling Up Nutrition movement and plays a central role in working with a number of sub-Saharan countries to support its implementation through their respective national nutrition strategies and plans.

Right to education

20. Ireland recognizes the right to education as a fundamental human right. Irish Aid's education policy is based on the premise that all children should have access to free primary education. The provision of quality basic education in developing countries is a priority for Ireland. Ireland pays particular attention to improving

education quality, promoting gender equality and targeting groups that are marginalized. At a global level, Ireland supports the Global Partnership for Education.

Health

21. Ireland recognizes the role that poverty, gender inequality and abuse of human rights play in the spread of HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases. Addressing HIV and AIDS and poor health is fundamental to poverty reduction and essential for human development. Through its aid programme, Ireland is demonstrating a strong commitment to combating HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases with the support of more than €100 million annually. In May 2011, Ireland joined the Board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, one of the key bodies combating disease in developing countries, and uses this position to further advance international efforts to combat HIV and AIDS.

Supporting human rights defenders

22. In recognition of the crucial role that human rights defenders play in working to improve the human rights situation and standards in their countries, Ireland pledges to continue its work to promote the rights of human rights defenders and to oppose attempts to undermine their important work. We will also continue to be a strong supporter of the mandate and office of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

23. The adoption of the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders was one of the key outcomes of the Irish Presidency of the European Union in 2004 in the field of human rights. Ireland has also been active at the United Nations in the development of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and in the development of measures to protect the rights of human rights defenders. The Government provides multi-year funding to a number of Irish and international non-governmental organizations working to support human rights defenders at the local level and at the international policy level.

24. Ireland is also one of a small number of States that have a dedicated humanitarian visa scheme for recognized human rights defenders, facilitating their travel to Ireland for short stays for the purpose of respite or in the case of temporary safety issues.

Strengthening the United Nations human rights treaty body system

25. Ireland firmly believes that the United Nations treaty monitoring bodies are central to the functioning of the international human rights protection system. The growth in the number of treaty bodies and in the number of ratifications of international human rights instruments poses challenges to the coherence and functioning of these institutions. Ireland has hosted two meetings in Dublin as part of a consultative process that brings together members of the treaty monitoring bodies and other experts. The Dublin outcome document draws together the results of the reflection process, providing a strategic synthesis of the proposals that have emerged as well as clear recommendations to all relevant stakeholders.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

26. In January 2012, Ireland assumed the Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for the first time. The Irish Chairmanship is working closely with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to uphold commitments by OSCE on human rights, democracy and the rule of law and to address specific instances where these commitments are not being met. The human dimension of OSCE is a key priority for the Irish Chairmanship, and particular attention is being given to the right to freedom of expression and the corollary right to freedom of the media, including the online exercise of these rights.

To uphold and strengthen human rights at home

27. Ireland will continue to cooperate fully with the Human Rights Council's mechanisms, including the special procedures, by responding promptly and substantively to all their communications, facilitating their requests for visits and honouring our existing standing invitation to them.

28. Ireland is firmly committed to complying with its international obligations, including through timely reporting to the relevant United Nations treaty monitoring bodies.

29. Ireland has ratified the core United Nations human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. On 23 March 2012, Ireland signed the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The complaints mechanism that will be established by the Optional Protocol is in keeping with the spirit of the many independent complaints, monitoring and inspection bodies that are currently in place in Ireland. Signing this Optional Protocol has given us the opportunity to affirm our determination to achieve full respect for human rights in practice. We now make two specific additional commitments:

(a) Ireland was in the first group of countries to sign the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities when it was opened for signature and is totally committed to the implementation of its provisions and the consequent improvements in the lives of people with disabilities. We are committed to ratification as soon as possible;

(b) We also commit to ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances.

30. Ireland will seek to enhance its efforts to ensure that all existing national mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights are strengthened:

(a) The country's Programme for Government, published in March 2011, requires all public bodies to take due note of equality and human rights in carrying out their functions. Government strategies have aimed at improving the practical

delivery of human rights obligations throughout all levels of society, and a number of national strategies have been developed to tackle specific areas of concern;

(b) Ireland is firmly committed to promoting an inclusive society and to eliminating all forms of racial discrimination. As a follow-up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, Ireland developed the National Action Plan against Racism that focused on supporting key stakeholders in the development of locally based anti-racism strategies and social inclusion measures to promote diversity;

(c) Ireland has established a number of independent statutory agencies to help maintain public confidence in the organs of public administration and to provide for complaints procedures, including the Equality Authority, the National Disability Authority, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Ombudsman for Children's Office and the Garda Síochána (Irish Police) Ombudsman Commission.

31. Ireland is committed to continuing to provide support for human rights education and training domestically in order to enhance awareness and respect for human rights across all sectors of society. Human rights issues are addressed at both the primary and secondary levels of education and there are human rights programmes in a significant number of tertiary-level education institutions in Ireland. Human rights also feature prominently in police and Defence Forces training at all levels.

32. Ireland commits to upholding the independence of its national human rights institution, the Irish Human Rights Commission, which was established in 2001 in line with the Paris Principles. The Commission is an independent body charged with promoting and protecting human rights for all people within the State. It is empowered to make recommendations to the Government, including on legislative proposals, and has recently published the *Human Rights Guide for the Civil and Public Service*. The Irish Human Rights Commission and the Equality Authority will be merged to form a new strengthened and enhanced Human Rights and Equality Commission.

33. Ireland is fully committed to a pluralistic and open democracy and values the role played by a diverse and inclusive civil society in this regard. The importance that Ireland places upon this crucial role is reflected in the comprehensive consultation mechanisms that exist between the Government of Ireland and its social partners. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade consults with non-governmental organizations regarding human rights in Irish foreign policy through its Standing Committee on Human Rights, as well as through the annual Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade NGO Human Rights Forum.

Conclusion

34. The commitment of Ireland to the promotion and protection of human rights is an underlying principle of our foreign policy. Our deep attachment to the importance of fundamental rights and freedoms for all is grounded in our historical experience. We strongly believe in the need for a shared effort to advance the values at the heart of the Charter of the United Nations. Serving as a member of the Human Rights Council would enable Ireland to make a distinctive contribution to that effort.